Dharma Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on August 4th, 1996 in Plum Village, France.

The Five-Fold Steps of Training

August 4, 1996

Good morning, my friends. Today is the fourth of August, 1996, we are in the Lower Hamlet, and we are going to speak English.

In the past three weeks we have been talking with each other about how to run the twenty-first century, how to climb together the hill of the twenty-first century, with joy and peace and happiness. We already talked about a room in our home so that we can practice restoring our self, restoring peace, joy and communication. We also talked about a little park in our neighborhood so that people in the neighborhood may enjoy walking meditation, sitting together in peace, and so on.

We also have talked about how to maintain peace in school. I think we have to ask schoolteachers how we could have more peace and joy and harmony in school. Not only do we have to ask them, but we have to sit down together, teachers and students, in order to decide how we can make the school a beautiful place in which to live. I know of a number of schools where teachers and students practice being quiet during the first three or five minutes and just enjoy breathing in and out; and every time there is disharmony, there is anger, in school, everyone in the school practices sitting down and breathes in and out peacefully.

I don’t think that this is a Buddhist practice alone; it is a practice that everyone likes. I am sure that the Catholics like the practice, the Protestants, the Jews, the Muslims also, because everyone values peace and harmony, and everyone knows that to breathe in and out deeply is very good. Doctors, scientists, nurses: they know very well that breathing quietly, slowly and deeply is very good. When a nurse gives you a shot, she may ask you to breathe in and out peacefully, and while you are preoccupied with breathing in and out, she just gives the shot and you don’t feel anything at all; you feel fine.

I know of a school teacher whose name is Henry. He teaches mathematics in a high school in Toronto. He is old-I think he has arrived at the age where he can retire; but the principal of the high school and all the other teachers asked him to stay on because people like his teaching so much. The first time he came to Plum Village for the practice of mindfulness, he confessed that the thing he liked best was to go fishing. When other people could not catch a fish, he did not know why, but he continued to catch fish after fish. That is why he liked it so much. But after staying in Plum Village, he decided that killing fish like that is not a nice thing. These beautiful little animals are swimming very happily in the stream, and suddenly you’ve caught them, and they die. So he decided to abandon fishing as a hobby, and he thought that, when he went home, he would find other kinds of joys. He found a lot of joys.

But he had some difficulties adjusting the way of life he learned at Plum Village to his environment. The day class resumed, he came in the classroom using walking meditation. He never did that before. He opened the door slowly, he entered slowly, he smiled to the students, and he walked slowly to his desk. And then when he stood up and wiped the blackboard, he did it mindfully, slowly, and all the students were very surprised. They thought that he was sick.

So they asked, “Papa, are you sick?” Because they love him; he’s a very excellent mathematics teacher. He was very well known in Vietnam as a mathematics teacher. He wrote many good books on mathematics. He used to get angry with his students. Every time a child couldn’t give an answer to his question or showed his stupidity, he would get angry. He might just pick up a piece of chalk and throw it directly to the head of the student. That’s the way he had done in the past. And when he corrected math exercises, he might get angry; he might write down, “You are stupid.” But still, the students liked him. There is something in him that makes the students like him, that is why they call him “Papa.”

“Papa, are you sick?” He smiled and said, “No, I am not sick. I am practicing mindfulness.” “What is mindfulness?” He began to explain, “I am wiping out the things on the blackboard, and I do it slowly, I dwell in the present moment, and I enjoy doing that. I don’t hurry in order to finish it. I just enjoy every step I make. You see, this morning, I came in, I saw you, I’m very happy. So I just stop and look at you and smile, and that makes me very happy.” He spent a few minutes talking about what he had learned in Plum Village. Then he talked with them about the wonders of mindful breathing. He said, “I got a lot of calm when I was in Plum Village, and I want you to try it. Let us sit down; we don’t have any bell here, but I will ask a boy to do like this [clap, clap] and then all of us just sit quietly and enjoy breathing in, calming, and breathing out, smiling.”

There they went, the boy in the front did like this [clap, clap] and then he and all the rest of the students practiced breathing in and breathing out. He said, “That is excellent. Why don’t we do it for two minutes?” And they did it for two minutes. I think the students listen to him and like to try because they have sympathy with him. He proposed that every fifteen minutes there would be a pause of two minutes. Another boy would take a turn to [clap, clap] and then everyone would stop. He would stop lecturing, and everyone would practice breathing and smiling. They don’t have a bell, so they just stopped by the sound. After a few months of practice like that, both teachers and students realized that they had made a lot of progress in their studies. The class has grown much more peaceful. And they love it, they continue that practice of breathing, smiling, in the beginning of the class and in the middle of the class. So, they could have three times to breathe in and out and enjoy being together.

Professor Henry reported to me in a letter that other classes learned about that, and they adopted the same kind of breathing in, out, and get three breaks during the hour of mathematics. At one point the whole school knew about the practice, and all of them enjoyed it. And that is why, when our Professor Henry asked for retirement, they said, "No, you have to stay on, you have helped us so much." Now Professor Henry no longer does things like throwing a piece of chalk directly at the head of his students. He told me that one time when he was correcting an exercise, he saw that the student did not understand anything at all. In the past he would write down, “You are stupid,” but this time he did not write down that kind of word. He wrote like this: “My dear, you d= on’t understand; that’s my fault.” A very deep transformation. And the student who received that correction got moved to tears. “It’s my fault because I did not try my best to help you understand, that is why you don’t understand me.” Henry has come back to Plum Village several times for the practice; he’s coming for this September retreat. He received the Five Wonderful Precepts many years ago, and finally he was asked to become a Dharma teacher. Those of you who will be back here for September, you will meet him.

So I would like to tell the young people who are here today, you can practice peace at school. The other day I asked you to ask your teacher when there is a conflict between you and someone else and you get irritated or angry, and you don’t know what to do to preserve peace and to reconcile. A teacher should know. If she does not know yet, it is her duty to go and learn from someone else. It’s very important; you just ask the question, and you make the wheel begin to turn. Yesterday, a mother told me that her daughter did not speak English, so her daughter had asked her to ask me what she can do every time she gets angry: I recommended that they ask their mother first. So if you ask your mother or your father that question, and the answer is not completely satisfying, then they will try harder and next time they will show you not only the theory, but also the practice.

In our hospitals, we’ve got to have a practice center. I have seen in many big cities, like in Amsterdam, hospitals in which there is a meditation hall, a chapel for the people to sit, to pray, to meditate. This is very important, because the people who are sick need a place to practice, and when their families come, they also need a place to practice. And when a relative undergoes surgery, members of their families, in order to deal with their worries, should be able to practice, and they need a center like that. There should be brothers and sisters who are trained in the art of meditation in order to serve in these hospitals. I think I am going to write a letter to the monks and nuns in Vietnam, and also to the government, about how to set up a meditation hall in every hospital of the country.

And I think that a meditation hall is needed in each school for students and for teachers. I know teachers sometimes suffer very much because of their students and they need to practice, and students also need to practice; therefore, to have a meditation hall or a chapel in school, that is very important. We have the right to ask for that. You know that all spiritual traditions, they would tell you that you need the same kind of thing. It is neither a Buddhist, nor a Christian, nor a Jewish practice, it is just practice; because all of us need peace, restoration, and so on. So in the twenty-first century I’m confident that people, including yourself, will try your best in order to set up meditation halls in schools and in hospitals.

[Bell]

I would ask also for a meditation hall in each city's central park. The park is something like an island of peace. When the people in the city are suffocated, they don't feel well within their body, in their mind, they would think of the park. If they are in the middle of the week, they cannot get out of town, then the park is the answer. That is why you have to take care of the central park. We have to make all the trees and streams of water clear and beautiful; we need silence in the park. And we need a meditation hall without any symbols, whether Buddhist or Catholic or Jewish. We don't need symbols, because it is for everyone. In Bois de Boulogne, Bois de Vincennes, even in the Tivoli park, we need a meditation hall. Of course, in a park we would need ice cream and hot chocolate, but we must have a meditation hall. By the way, I don't like children to eat too many ice creams in Plum Village. I think a child is entitled to have one only each day, that is the maximum.

And I want a meditation hall in the parliament house, in the city hall, because I have seen people debating in the house of parliament. This is war, this is not peace. They hit each other with poisonous arrows of speech. They are angry, they don't have peace at all, and we don't want people without peace to represent us in parliament. Do you? No. If they don't have peace, they don't have harmony within themselves and with the other members of the parliament, then they make decisions that go against our interests. So if you are a writer, if you are an artist, if you are a member of the parliament, if you are a member of the city council, or if you are only a householder, you have to do everything in your power to express your view that you want the person who represents you in the Congress and in the city hall to practice peace. Before you vote for him or for her, look; look carefully to see whether in his or her family, there is harmony or not. This is very important; we have to ask. We have the right to ask whether they have harmony with their partner, their children, because they are public people and they have to make everything transparent.

We should be able to know whether they can use loving speech, whether they can master their anger, whether they can practice somehow looking deeply. Because looking deeply is a matter for everyone, especially for those who have to confront very difficult problems concerning the economy, social conflicts, social injustice, and especially war with another country. If you have no right view within you, if you have no insight within you, you have no harmony, understanding, or compassion, you may declare war with another country and you draw the whole country into war. This is very important.

Therefore, there must be a meditation hall in Congress. It would be beautiful if Congressmen or Senators, before starting a session, would sit together breathing in and out, in peace and make the determination to hold the session in peace and harmony and not just fight each other. This is very important. This is peace education, and who can realize that? You claim to be a democracy, so you have to do it. Citizens have to do it. So when we sit for Dharma discussion, we have to find ways in order to put into practice what we learn from the Five Wonderful Steps of Training.

At the city hall, we need it. Suppose the river that goes through our city is polluted, fish die in that river, who will be responsible? The whole city is responsible; but it is the city council that has to take the matter in hand, so they have to practice looking deeply together at how to save the river. In your home, in your neighborhood, you also organize for looking deeply at your part; and at the city center, city council, they have to practice looking deeply at their part. And we may support them with our insight: "Dear city council, we are in that quarter of the city, we have sat down, we have practiced looking deeply, and this is what we have found out." We can support our city council by the fruit of our practice of looking deeply. The city council, the city hall, has to make decisions based on this insight. If they don't, next time they will not be in the city council. All this is practice, and we practice as a Sangha and not as individuals.

How about places like l'Elysee or the White House, where the president and the government meet to make decisions? How about the military headquarters? I think it is like in our home: there should be a place of peace for the president, for his ministers, to sit in, to breathe together, to calm themselves, before they look into the urgent matters of the nation. And you have the right to request that. You have to speak out your aspiration, after having practiced looking deeply. We don't ask them to follow any particular religion; we just ask them to have a little bit more peace and calm and understanding and harmony within themselves, and we are ready to support them. We will write letters without anger, we will practice talking to them with loving kindness; but we have to do nonviolent action. Loving action has to be taken by us every day.

Decision-making is too important to leave to them alone; you have to take in hand your own fate, and therefore I want the children to hear this, because the twenty-first century is theirs. We adults are very sorry not to have been able to do it during the twentieth century, so we

hope that in the twenty-first century you will be able to do that. We are already a little bit enlightened on the matter; we have suffered so much, and we have made you suffer. So we will be supporting you wholeheartedly, and many of us will be climbing with you the hill of the twenty-first century. Please, the people who are less young, also have Dharma discussions on this and make known your insight, your decisions. Now, the young people, when they hear the small bell, they would stand up and bow to the Sangha before they go out to continue their studies and practice.

Dear friends, the Buddhadharma is described as something that you can come and see by yourself. You don't have to believe something through another person, even the clergy, the priest, the mediator. The ultimate dimension of reality is something you can touch, you can see by yourself. And you can do it now, and here; it's not a problem of time. It's not a promise. In the method of Buddhism as I see it, it's very concrete; there's no place to speculate, to suppose, to create an hypothesis. When the Buddha set out to teach and to help people, the first thing he asked people is to look directly into their suffering. Suffering is not an abstract thing; suffering is there, very real. Suffering is one of the basic truths called holy truths, the Noble Truths. Suffering is a holy truth. Why?

In Vietnamese we call it thanh de, the holy truth. The word that the Buddha used is dukkha; dukkha means ill-being, pain, suffering, translated by Chinese kou. This word, kou, originally in Chinese means bitter, the opposite of sweet. It makes you suffer. And you have to look at it. Why is suffering a holy truth? Because, without suffering, you have no way out. The first thing you have to do is to look, and look deeply, into the nature of your suffering. If you cannot do that, if you try to run away from it, there's no way that you can transform your suffering. That is why suffering is the basic truth and a holy truth. It means we have to learn from our suffering. We have to understand our suffering. If we don't know anything about our suffering, if we cannot learn anything about our suffering, suffering is no longer a holy truth. Holy or not holy: it depends on our way of handling suffering. And the Buddha said suffering is absolutely necessary for you to find a way out.

A Zen teacher in Vietnam during the 13th century urged his students to practice diligently in order to get out of the world of birth and death. And a student asked him, "Teacher, please show us how to get out of the world of birth and death." And he said, "You have to look for the world of no birth and no death." Then the student asked, "But where can we find the world of no birth and no death?" And the teacher said, "You look for it right in the world of birth and death." It means, out of suffering you will find the way of transcending the suffering. It sounds like something contradictory, but it is the basic Buddhist teaching. So looking into the nature of suffering, you can see many, many things that you need to know.

How that suffering has come to be, that is the second truth. That is about the nature of your suffering. If you already see the nature of your suffering, how it has come to be, you are already on your way to liberation. That is a sentence uttered by the Buddha. Dear friends, if you look into the nature of your suffering, and if you see already what kind of nutriment that has brought about that suffering, you are already on the path of liberation; because everything needs food to grow, to be there, including your suffering. So if you look into your suffering, and if you can see how that has come to be, what kind of food you have fed it so that it is now there as a hard fact, then you are already on the way of liberation, because you have already seen a path of liberation. So the nature of your suffering is the cause of your suffering, the nutriment, the food that you have used in order to feed your suffering.

For instance, if you suffer from a depression now, your depression is dukkha, suffering. So you look into your depression; you need your depression in order to understand your depression. You should not try to run away from it. Go back; confront your depression; embrace it and look deeply into it, and you'll find out after a few days of practice that in the past few months or few years, you have lived in such a way that made depression possible now. Because your depression cannot come just like that, without any cause. You have got the nutrition, the nutriments, the food that has brought about the depression. What you have eaten, what you have drunk, what you have listened to, what you have viewed, what you have touched, are the kind of nutriments that have made up your depression now. So if you know the nature of your depression, you also know how to stop feeding your depression. And you use other kinds of nutriments for yourself, and a few months later, your depression will be gone.

Suppose the person you love just betrayed you and goes with another person. In the beginning you had hope that he and you would live a long life together, sharing everything, and he or she has made the solemn promise to live together until your hair becomes white, until all your teeth come out. But now, he just abandoned you and followed a young woman. You feel the victim of injustice. You cannot just accept that. You cannot accept the betrayal. You want him, you want her to be faithful.

Your suffering is there, and we advise you to embrace your suffering and look deeply into it and look into how that kind of betrayal has come to be. Who is responsible? What kind of nutriment has made it possible? That is the Buddhist way. You are advised to do it by yourself, if possible with the help of other brothers and sisters in the Dharma. They can do it with you. They can join their mindfulness and the practice of deep looking with you, and help you to discover the nature, the cause of your suffering. If I sit with you, if I practice with you, I may find out that you have been somehow responsible for his act of betrayal.

In the Buddhist teaching, we learn that we have all kinds of seeds within our consciousness. This is our consciousness; it is made up of two levels, at least. The deeper level is called store consciousness. In Buddhist psychology, we speak of consciousness in terms of seeds, les semences. The Sanskrit word is bija. We learn that in the store consciousness, we have all kinds of seeds within here. Seeds of compassion, mindfulness, tolerance, endurance, peace, joy, loving kindness. We have all the good seeds in us. And the Buddha is also there as a seed, the seed of Buddhahood, the seed of enlightenment, the seed of concentration, the seed of loving kindness, the seed of mindfulness. It is a fact, and not just a dogma, that you have the Buddha nature in you. You can touch it, you can make a demonstration, you can verify it. Because, according to this practice, mindfulness is the Buddha and loving kindness is the Buddha; understanding is the Buddha; and all of us have the potential of being mindful, of being understanding, of being compassionate.

Children have proved that at times they can be compassionate, mindful, understanding; and adults also. That is the Buddha nature in us. When I ask you to drink your glass of water mindfully, you can do it, you can drink your water mindfully. That means mindfulness is possible for you; you have a seed of mindfulness within your store consciousness. That is why you can practice, and you can be successful in drinking your water mindfully, or in walking mindfully. That is a demonstration that Buddha is in you, because mindfulness is very often described as the energy of a Buddha. A Buddha, a real Buddha, is made with that kind of energy. You have it. You don’t need to believe, because you already have direct knowledge about it. It’s not exactly a religious belief; this is just an experience.

But in your store consciousness there are other, negative, seeds, like the seed of ignorance, the seed of forgetfulness which is the opposite of mindfulness. Strange, you have the seed of mindfulness and you have the opposite kind of seed. Mara is the equivalent of Satan. If you want to invite the Buddha, you can. If you want to invite Satan to come up, he will be glad to come up. And Buddha and Mara both are of an organic nature. That is the teaching of the Buddha. Buddha and Mara, mindfulness and forgetfulness, both of them are organic substance because they can deteriorate. It’s like a flower and garbage. A flower can become the piece of garbage. The piece of garbage, if you know how to do it, will be transformed back into the flower. Mindfulness and forgetfulness play the role of flower and garbage in us, also Buddha and Mara, because we are a living reality; we are not a piece of inert matter in a museum of life. We are a living thing, therefore everything in us is alive, including Buddha and Mara. How wonderful: Buddha is alive in us, not a notion, a concept.

And you have that seed of jealousy in you. You have also the seed of betrayal in you. All of us are able to betray the people we love, not only he, but you. All of us have the seed of loyalty, all of us have the seed of betrayal. If you have not betrayed him, it is because the seed of betrayal in you has not been watered by yourself and by the people who live around you. But if you allow your seed of betrayal to be watered today, tomorrow, by yourself and by the people around you, one day you will betray him, you will betray her. That’s something sure.

Now, practice looking deeply to see, what have you done in the past? Have you allowed the seed of betrayal in him to be watered? Who has watered that seed? Did you water that seed yourself? Have you made an effort to remain fresh and loving? If you have not made any effort to remain fresh and pleasant, then you yourself have contributed to the watering of the seed of betrayal. People usually love what is lovable. If you have stopped being lovable, then you help the other way. Have you been very mindful in taking care of him? Have you allowed a situation to happen in which his seed of betrayal has been able to be watered every day? Outside of your mindfulness you have allowed everything to take place, and now you blame him, blame that person for your suffering.

Maybe the suffering, the cause of the suffering comes from yourself, mostly. You just think that you are a victim of injustice, all the suffering that you have now has come from the other person. You blame him or her entirely, and that is injustice on your part because you don’t see the truth. You don’t know how to handle your suffering, you don’t know how to look into that holy truth, suffering, in order to see the real nature of that suffering. The first truth is holy, that is suffering. The second truth is holy also, that is the nature of your suffering. You need mindfulness, you need looking deeply, you need concentration in order to find out that holy truth.

The third truth is that your suffering can be healed, can be transformed. Because it is not a hope, it is a fact that if something has come, it can go away. If you used some kind of nutriment to bring up something, now if you don't want that something to stay, you just cut the nutriment. That is the simple truth, the truth of the absence of suffering. Suffering can be transformed, that is the third holy truth. It's rather comforting. There are people who say Buddhism is a little bit too pessimistic, they always begin with talking about suffering. But that is not pessimism; that is realism, realistic. Because when you peer into the truth of suffering, you see not only the second noble holy truth, but also the third noble truth, which is the possibility of removing the suffering. That's rather good news. You are confident that with some practice, you can end the suffering, you can bring back the state of well-being to you, and to the people around you. Because the first truth is the presence of ill-being, the third truth is the absence of ill-being, which means at the same time the presence of well-being. That's nirvana; nirvana is the extinction of suffering and of all the nutriments that have brought suffering to you. Is it too late or not? It's never too late.

Part II

Suffering is still going on if you don't practice, or if the other person doesn't practice. So now, if you want to take the initiative, you don't demand anything, you don't require any preconditions, you just begin to stop feeding your suffering. You do it with your faith in the third noble truth, holy truth. "I have to stop feeding my pain, my suffering." And that kind of conviction, that kind of attitude can already bring you a lot of comfort. Then we learn that we have to practice expanding our heart. We should be able to realize many conditions of our happiness and peace. We should have several roots. The other day when I talked to the young people, I told them that if we are mindful, we can be aware of many things, many elements in us and around us that can make us happy. Don't commit yourself to just one idea of happiness.

There was a layman who was asked to give a Dharma talk to monks and nuns because he was so well versed in Buddhism. That happened in the 1930's in Hue. It was to him a very great joy to be able to help the monks and the nuns with his knowledge and understanding of the sutra. I think he was teaching the Surangama Sutra. Before coming to the chair to teach, he touched the earth three times before his students. One day, as he was walking up the hill to go to the temple to give his instructions on the Surangama, he saw two young boys on the sidewalk enjoying a chess game. He also enjoyed playing, so he wanted to take a few minutes to sit with the little boys, and he enjoyed it so much that he almost forgot that he had to go to the temple and give the Dharma talk. Another friend of his, coming by, saw him like that. He said, "Dear friend, do you know what time it is now? Let us go!" And then he climbed the hill with the other person.

His name is Tam Minh, Clarity of the Heart. He had the capacity of being happy with whatever was there around him and in him. To give a Dharma talk to the monks and nuns was a joy, but to sit down with children was also a joy. And not only that; everything around him could make him happy. So we should not commit ourselves to just one thing. We should not ruin our life just because of one thing. A French poet said, "Un seul être me manque, et tout est dépeuplé," "Only one person is not there, and I see the whole world as empty." Why? Why behave like that? Because there are many living beings around; why look upon them as nonexistent? How could that being be there if all of us were not there?

So look deeply into the nature of your suffering and practice loving kindness, practice understanding, so that you will not continue to blame. You see your responsibility, you see your way of salvation, of liberation, you are able to touch many wonders of life that are available to you in the here and the now, and suddenly you become the most attractive person, very refreshing, very healing. And everyone will go back to you, because we need you. If you are fresh, happy, peaceful like that, every one of us will need you, will look in your direction, they would follow you, especially those of us who are suffering a lot.

The first holy truth is dukkha, suffering; the second truth is the nature of our suffering, samut kaya and the cause of our suffering, the n. . . [GAP -- end of side two of latest tape]

The third truth is the possibility of removing the suffering, Narodha. The absence, the taking away of suffering, which means at the same time the presence of well-being. The fourth truth is Marga, the way, the way of practice, the dharma. How not to continue to feed your suffering; how to offer yourself the opposite kind of nutriments; that is, the dharma The Five Steps of Training are really the way. The way as presented by our teacher, the Buddha, is

the Eightfold Noble Path. Right understanding, right speech, right thinking, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. If you practice the Five Steps of Training, you practice the Eightfold Noble Path in a very concrete way. If you put all your being into the practice, if you abide by the practice of mindfulness of consuming, of speaking, of listening, then that is the suppression of the suffering because you don't allow the nutriment for suffering to continue any more.

The other day, we were speaking about the First, the Second, and the Third Steps of Training: to protect life, to practice giving, social justice, and to preserve the integrity of couples and families and protect children from sexual abuse. All these things are right action, right view, right efforts. The moment when you undertake to practice these precepts, trainings, you already begin to get relief. I will offer you an example. There was a Vietnam war veteran who came and participated in a retreat offered by us to about thirty or forty former soldiers, army officers, who had fought in Vietnam, together with twenty or thirty other people, including psychotherapists and family members and so on. I remember we had to practice listening deeply every day and with a lot of patience in order to allow a situation where the veterans can speak out. It's very difficult, because many of them were caught in their own suffering, it's very hard for them to touch their suffering, and to talk about it. Sometimes I had to sit there for half an hour not saying anything, just breathing and smiling, and show our compassion, our readiness to listen. Yet no one could speak a word. And we begin again.

There was a war veteran who tried to join us in walking meditation, but he was so fearful. During the war he had learned that you can get into an ambush very easily, and there were many Vietnamese there. A Buddhist monk can be a guerrilla in disguise. So he was scared to death. He tried to join others for walking meditation, but he kept a very big distance; he walked behind us about thirty meters. He thought that if anything happened, he would have time to run for cover. Instead of staying in the dormitory with us, he camped in the forest and he set traps around his tent. That was our first retreat organized for war veterans in America.

One of the retreatants finally told us his story, that had never been told before. During a battle in Vietnam, most of his friends were killed in an operation, and he saw his companions die. So he got very angry. He wanted to retaliate. He brought out a number of sandwiches, he put explosives inside the sandwiches, he left them on the place where children would play, and he hid himself and watched. He saw children coming. They were very happy to see this kind of sandwich, and ate them. And just ten or fifteen minutes later, they began to scream, and their mothers came out, trying to get them to the hospital, but the American soldier knew that nothing could be done in order to help the children. He had wanted to do so out of his anger and the will to retaliate. Since the time he went back to America, he could not live with that kind of image in his store consciousness. He told us that every time he found himself together with a few children in a room, he had to run out of that room as quickly as possible. He just couldn't bear it, for more than twelve years. His mother encouraged him to deal with the present time, to forget the war, the war was over; but for him, the war was never over. Until he came to the retreat.

I told him, "Yes, I know that you have killed children. You have ambushed them as your way to retaliate. I know you have caused suffering. But I want you to know also that there are many children who are dying around the world, everywhere. Many die just because they need just one medicine pill. Many children die because they need a glass of milk, soy milk. Many step on grenades and bombs that are left over there. If you know how to use your time, now, you can save many of them, even every day. You have the capacity of acting, of living in mindfulness, in compassion, and I know you will be able to save the lives of many children, now. Why don't you make a determination to receive the First Precept of not killing, of protecting life? You receive that precept in the presence of the whole Sangha.

"And you take action right away. You go out and you save children who are dying in the present moment, children even in America. In America there are children who are dying every day because of stupid causes. Children in Southeast Asia, in Africa, everywhere. You know that you have an American passport. You can go almost everywhere, not like the boat people. The boat people, because they don't have a piece of paper, they are thrown back to the sea and die; but you, you are different. You are an American citizen. You can go where you want, and you can help many children from dying. So make the determination. Receive the First Precept, and act." And the teaching was already a drop of Dharma nectar. When a drop of Dharma nectar fell into his heart, it opened. He was transformed right away, in that moment. And he made the determination to receive the First Precept and to go out and help.

Suddenly, you become a bodhisattva with a lot of energy within you, and that is exactly the kind of energy that you need to heal. Why remain immobilized, paralyzed in your suffering? Why continue to be the victim of your sorrow? The Five Steps of Training can open up the door for you to transform your life, to transform the lives of living beings on Earth. Because that is the way of loving, protecting, and offering joy and peace. This is not an idea, this is not a dogma, this is not a promise. The Buddhadharma is something you can come and see

by yourself, and touch by yourself. The healing can take place right away, the moment when you embrace the Dharma.

A writer, a woman writer with a lot of talent, she came to me and confessed that she was abused as a little girl and she has carried that kind of suffering within her. She doesn't feel that she's a normal person. I helped her to practice. I said, "Sit down and practice looking with me. Are you angry at that person? Don't you think that he was sick? It was only sick people who do that kind of thing to children and ruin their life. Do you see the suffering in that person, how that person has been brought up? There are many of them like that to be helped. You know, you are a writer. You can help these people. You can do more; you can help the children who are about to be molested by these people. You have the energy, the talent that you need.

"You have to make the vow, the determination to receive the Third Precept: I am aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct in family circles. I have seen children molested and suffer for their whole life, and I now undertake to practice the Third Precept in order to protect the integrity of families, individuals, and children. I am determined to learn ways to do that with my Sangha, because I know that if I continue to recite the Five Steps of Training, to hold Dharma discussions with my Sangha, and learn better ways to practice them, then I will be able to help." During a Precepts transmission ceremony, the Sangha is there with their best presence and they witness to the fact that you are undertaking the path. During that moment, transformation takes place already, because you receive a lot of energy the moment you decide to receive and practice the Steps of Training.

[Bell]

The healing takes place very quickly, and you put your heart into the practice. Concerning the Fourth Precept, we see that it is the art of deep listening and loving speech. We know that a lot of suffering has been created by our lack of capacity to listen deeply and with compassion to the other person. If there is no communication possible between you and her or him, that's because you don't practice; you are not able to listen with calm, with compassion. Avalokiteshvara is the one who shows the talent of listening deeply with compassion. When we evoke the name of Avalokiteshvara, we must be determined to learn his way of deep listening, compassionate listening.

In order to be able to listen with calm and compassion, we should train ourselves in the art of mindful breathing, mindful walking, mindful sitting, so that every time we hear things that shock our ears, that are provocative, that go against our common sense, we will not get irritated. Because the moment we show our irritation at the anger, the other person will stop talking. So we have to listen in such a way that encourages the other person to continue to talk, because it's very healing for him or for her. You are the best therapist if you know the art of compassionate listening. You listen because you have compassion; you want to relieve him or her of the suffering and not because you want to listen in order to analyze, or judge, or condemn, or correct.

Compassionate listening is just to give the other person a chance to empty what is in their heart. Because he has had no one to listen to him, he has become more and more like a bomb, ready to explode; she also. So you are afraid of him, of her, you don't want to approach, because you are afraid of the explosion. And as you try to avoid him or her, they think that we despise them, we want to boycott them and the suffering will increase. So the only alternative is to train ourselves in the art of deep listening, compassionate listening, and go to him or her to help. If you cannot do that, who in the world can? Because you may be the closest person to him or to her. So the Fourth Step of Training is about deep listening and using loving speech.

How to practice that? Sit quietly, and maintain your mindful breathing, and nourish your compassion. Remind yourself that you are listening in order to relieve him or her of the suffering and not for anything else. Then when the other person says things that are wrong, incorrect, full of injustice, misunderstanding, you can continue to listen with serenity. That is the act of Avalokiteshvara. Many of us are able to do that after some time of practice and that is very healing. If at some point you feel that your capacity of listening has come to a limit, you cannot go on for another five minutes, so you have to bow and say "Darling, could we continue later on? I need to do something right now, I would love to continue to listen." Don't try too hard; because you should know your limit. I also practice that. I learn about my limits. I know that I should not try to do more than I can.

This is one thing I repeat over and over again to the people who attend retreats on helping

professions: nurses and doctors and psychotherapists, social workers and so on. Because they see suffering a little bit too much, and they try too hard and they get burnt out very quickly. So you practice more, get refreshed, and then you offer another session of compassionate listening. If you are to explain to him or her about his or her misunderstanding, about your own suffering, then you should, we should, be able to use loving speech. We can tell the truth, but in such a way that the other person can see, can understand. We speak not for expressing our anger, just trying to help the other person to see. And that is why calm, serenity, and loving kindness should be there while we speak. Every time we feel some irritation coming up, we cannot swallow our suffering, and then we should stop. We should ask for another chance to do it; don't continue. We should know our limit.

That is about the Fourth Step of Training, the only kind of practice that can restore communication. That is something we have to practice as individuals, as partners, father and son, mother and daughter; and we have to practice as nation with nation, because our nation suffers, yes. But the other nation also suffers. We have to recognize that. We should not believe that we are the only nation that suffers. The other nation may be suffering at the same time, and on our part there may be misunderstanding, so we continue to blame each other and kill each other. The warring parties always do that.

If there is another nation that can come in and help, that's wonderful. But helping here does not mean to take sides, but to help both sides to calm down, to be able to tell the other side of the suffering in this side. Loving speech and deep listening should be applied between nations. That is why at the United Nations you also need the practice of listening. At peace talks, we do need that kind of discipline; and that is something, I hope, that will be possible to start in the twenty-first century.

Concerning the Fifth Precept, the Fifth Step of Training: Mindful consumption is the key word. Because you consume many things: food, drink, conversations, relationships, television, magazines, the so-called controlled items. Many of the items we consume contain toxins that bring war into our body and bring war into our consciousness, and water the negative seeds in us.There are so many kinds of food. Edible food ([ph: duan tuc]) is the first category of food. The second kind of food is [ph: sup tuc]: sense impressions. We open our eyes, our ear, our nose, our tongue, our body, our mind, to many kinds of foods. The sound, the image, the ideas, the touch, that we consume in our daily life can bring to us a lot of poisons and toxins. The Buddha said, suppose there is a cow that is seriously sick with a skin disease. [End of side three]

[gap in tape]

[Beginning of side four]

... suck the blood. If we bring the cow down to the water, tiny living beings in the water will come and cling to the cow and suck the blood. If you bring the cow close to a [circular?] tree, all the beings living in the bark of the tree will come out and stick to the cow to suck the blood. We human beings, we are like that in our daily life; we open wide our eyes, our nose, our tongue, our body, our mind, to that kind of touching. You just drive through the city, and all the things you see in the city -- the announcements, the commercials -- all these things become nutriments to your eyes, your ears. When you read, when you watch television, you are consuming. And you are very, very vulnerable, like the cow without skin. So poison just penetrates you like that, and you allow yourself to be poisoned like that in your daily life, and then you get the sickness, the suffering. So Mindfulness of consumption is the only way to protect yourself from ingesting poisons every day. Practice and protect yourself and protect your children from that kind of unmindful consumption. That is the Fifth Precept, very important. How could you get rid of your depression if you don't practice the Fifth Step of Training?

The Five Steps of Training are to be studied more deeply by Dharma discussions, so that we may learn better ways of practicing mindfulness: mindfulness of speech, mindfulness of listening, mindfulness of consumption, mindfulness of protecting life, and so on. Who is the author of the Five Steps of Training? Who has created them? It's you yourself. It is our mindfulness that has brought about the insight of the Five Steps of Training. The Buddha was one of the people who have contributed to the art of mindful living. He proposed the Five Precepts, yes. But since that time, many generations have come and practiced, and contributed their insight in the practice. The Five Steps of Training as presented to you today are the fruit of many generations' practice. If during your practice you find out other things, you have insight that can improve the way to present the Five Steps of Training, to modify the wording, then you are among the coauthors of the Five Steps of Training. This is not something imposed on us by a deity, by a god. This is a collective product of those who

practice mindfulness, and out of their insight, they see the path, they see the Fourth Truth, the Truth about the path of liberation.

For those of us who have practiced the Five Steps of Training, we see it as the way for the world to get out of these difficult situations. The Five Steps of Training are also instruments for dialogue with people of other spiritual traditions. This is the way we adopt so that a future would be possible for our children and their children. Have you tried something similar like this? What do you have to tell us, to help us to improve our practice? That is why during the conference organized by Gorbachev in San Francisco, the State of the World Forum, I did not talk much about other things. I just talked about mindful living and the Five Wonderful Precepts.

So all of you who have received the Five Steps of Training, learned the art of mindful living, I hope that you have the opportunity to deepen your understanding of these Steps of Training. I hope that you will continue to have a Sangha where you are, so that you can continue to explore, to deepen your understanding. Then you'll be able to share them with many people around you, so that we have a future for our children and their children for the twenty-first century, and don't repeat the same kind of errors and mistakes that we have made during this twentieth century.